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WATER

The ambitious Mekedatu project figured prominently in the state budget, with CM Siddaramaiah giving a push for speedy clearance. The CM also said a survey is under way to identify land and count trees that will be submerged.

WOMEN

The government has significantly bolstered budget allocations for women and child development for 2024-25, at a hefty ₹34,406 crore. The surge in allocation is notable even within CM Siddaramaiah's own tenure.

POWER

CM Siddaramaiah allocated ₹23,159 crore to the energy sector, which is 6% of the total allocation. He also announced several long-term initiatives, such as increasing installed power generation capacity to 60,000MW in next seven years.

SIDDU DELIVERING WELFARE SCHEMES ON BORROWED MONEY

CM presents deficit budget; Borrowing at ₹1 lakh crore the highest ever; More funds for programmes for women, youth, SC/STs, backward classes; ₹52,000 crore for guarantees

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @Bengaluru

CHIEF Minister Siddaramaiah presented a Rs 3,71,383 crore state budget for 2024-25 with a continued focus on welfare programmes and an eye on the Lok Sabha polls in the coming months. The welfare programmes are set to receive an allocation of around Rs 1.20 lakh crore.

His 15th budget, eighth as CM — and the first ever with the picture of the Preamble of the Indian Constitution on a Karnataka budget copy cover — was a deficit budget, the borrowing crossing Rs 1 lakh crore, the highest ever.

In his longest budget speech of 3.15 hours, Siddaramaiah (who holds the finance portfolio) revealed that their borrowing increased by close to Rs 19,428 crore compared to 2023-24, while capital outlay (to create assets) increased only by Rs 1,671 crore this year. Interestingly, the CM's budget has increased allocation to social services by Rs 22,613 crore compared to 2023-24. This indicates that Siddaramaiah's borrowing might be flowing to welfare schemes.

"Though I have presented a revenue deficit budget, I have increased the budgetary allocation for welfare programmes to Rs 1.20 lakh crore," he said, adding that he is confident of achieving revenue surplus after next two years as projected in the Medium-term Fiscal Policy (MTFP).

The CM tried to stress his budget by providing more funds for programmes for women, youth, SC/ST and backward, besides Bengaluru development. The CM claimed that his budget maintained fiscal discipline that is limited under Karnataka Fiscal Responsibility Act 2022.

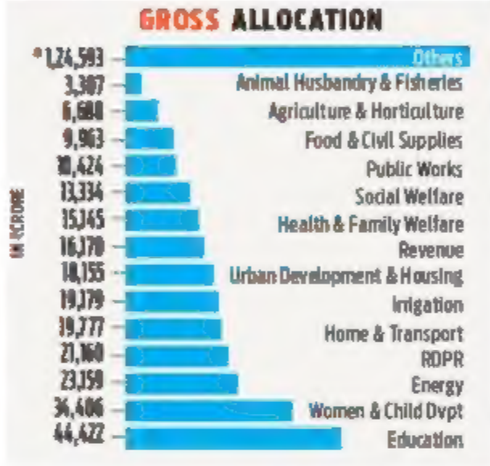
Defending the guarantee schemes, the CM said they estimated Rs 52,000 crore for the schemes this year. "Through the guarantee schemes, an average of Rs 50,000 to Rs 55,000 is transferred to each family per year. Implementation of guarantee schemes has brought us admiration from the entire world," he said.

With an eye on mobilising funds and increasing revenues, Siddaramaiah announced that shops and establishments will be allowed to remain open till 1 am in Bengaluru and 10 other corporation areas. He also increased tax collection targets in some sectors for 2024-25, setting a target of Rs 1.10 lakh crore for the commercial tax department as compared to Rs 1.01 lakh crore last year; while for the excise department, it is Rs 38,525 crore against Rs 36,000 crore in 2023-24. One per cent "fire cess" will be levied on property tax of newly constructed multistoried buildings, the funds from which would be used to increase efficiency in the fire and emergency services department. P5

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah greets fellow legislators, as he presents the state budget for fiscal 2024-25, in Vidhana Soudha, Bengaluru, on Friday | EXPRESS

K'TAKA BUDGET 2024-25
DECODED
ILLUSTRATION: SOURAV ROY
We are marching ahead towards setting a new example of Karnataka model of development founded on the principles of justice, equality and fraternity enshrined in our Constitution
Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister
₹2,90,531 Revenue expenditure
₹55,877 Capital expenditure
₹24,974 Loan repayment
₹ IN CRORE

TOTAL OUTLAY OF BUDGET ₹3,71,383



This is a hopeless budget on all fronts and there is no vision for development of the state contrary to what was claimed by Congress leaders. This budget fails to instill confidence in the public

R Ashoka, LoP

With this budget, Siddaramaiah has laid the foundation for the destruction of the state

HD Kumaraswamy, JDS state president

CM Siddaramaiah has announced Karnataka Raitha Samruddhi Yojane, bringing new hope for farmers, who have been battered by drought and floods. The CM also allocated ₹6,688 crore for agriculture and horticulture.

Tunnel rd, skydeck to make B'luru 'world class'

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

CHIEF Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday announced several measures to ease Bengaluru's traffic and improve its image.

Presenting the state budget, he said steps will be taken to strengthen the city's public transport system, improve roads, address water and air pollution and digitise property records. Importance will be given to develop Bengaluru as a tourism hub.

Siddaramaiah said the property tax collection target will be increased, and advertisement and floor area ratio (FAR) policies revised. Shops and other business establishments will be allowed to remain open till 1am in Bengaluru and 10 other civic corporations.

"To make Bengaluru a world class city, the Brand Bengaluru concept and major reforms have been introduced," the CM said and announced that the proposed tunnel road project (Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's proposal) will be taken up on a pilot basis in Hebbal. Justifying the need for the tunnel project, Siddaramaiah said it would be difficult to widen roads in Bengaluru due to scarcity of land and acquisition problems. P3

Good news for tipplers! Prices of IML, beer to dip

NAUSHAD BIJAPUR @ Belagavi

PRICES of beer and Indian-Made Liquor (IML), which are high in Karnataka when compared to other states, are set to come down. The state government has decided to revise the prices of several brands of liquor and beer "to rationalise the tax slabs and make them competitive with neighbouring states," CM Siddaramaiah said while presenting the state budget on Friday. This means, prices of several liquor brands will be on par with those in other states. "Currently, prices of some premium brands of liquor and beer are high in Karnataka compared to the neighbouring states. To prevent people of Karnataka from bringing liquor from other states, the government will revise its prices. The prices of most brands of liquor and beer will be less when compared to other states when the budget is approved," a source in the Excise Department said.

However, the government will have to ensure that this move would not affect excise revenue collection, the source added. As against the tax revenue of Rs 28,181 crore collected in 2023-24 till January, the state government has fixed a target of Rs 38,525 crore for the next fiscal.

Siddaramaiah said all services of the Excise Department will be digitised, and timelines will be fixed for various services.

INSIDE
URBAN MOBILITY TO BE IMPROVED | P2
HEALING TOUCH, CANCER CARE GETS A FILLIP | P4
UNIT TO BUST FAKE NEWS ANNOUNCED | P4
CM: NO MINORITY APPEASEMENT | P5
LACED WITH LIES, SAY OPPN PARTIES | P5
₹850 CR TO EDUCATION SECTOR FOR INFRA UPGRADE | P6

500

TEST WICKETS

AND THE LEGEND GROWS

The milestone finally came on Thursday when India's R Ashwin dismissed England's Zak Crawley to reach his 500th Test wicket — the second Indian to reach the magic figure after Anil Kumble (619 wkts). His record is crazy. England were 207/2 in reply to India's 445 | P17

ASHWIN WITHDRAWN

In a late night development, the Indian cricket board said that the Tamil Nadu spinner had been withdrawn from the rest of the Test due to medical emergency in the family.

Govt-farmer talks +ve, next round on Sunday

HARPREET BAJWA @Chandigarh

THE third round of talks between farmers and the Centre ended on a positive note with resolution emerging on many sticking points, sources said, but no breakthrough could be achieved as some outstanding issues are yet to be sorted out.

The next round of talks will be held on Sunday evening. Till then, the farmers will stay put at the Punjab-Haryana border.

The five-hour marathon talks, which started on Thursday night, continued till the wee hours on Friday. "We had a positive discussion with the farmer leaders," said agriculture minister Arjun Munda.

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, who also took part in the talks, said consensus has been achieved on various points but some important issues are pending, which he said will be resolved soon.

Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said the Union ministers sought more time to decide on the MSP issue. "We want a positive result and do not want any confrontation. We are staying back at the borders. Otherwise, our plan to march to Delhi will continue," he said.

Meanwhile, Haryana police fired tear gas shells to disperse protesting farmers when they moved towards the barricades at the Shambhu border. In a separate incident, 63-year-old Gian Singh from Gurdaspur, who was protesting at the Shambhu border died of heart attack on Friday morning.

The Bharat Bandh called by some unions had a mixed reaction in Punjab and Haryana.

Tear gas being fired upon the protesting farmers at the Shambhu border during the Samyukta Kisan Morcha's Bharat Bandh in Patiala district on Friday | PTI

Cong a/cs frozen, defrozen in hours

PREETHA NAIR @New Delhi

HOURS after the Congress announced that its main accounts were frozen, the Income Tax department on Friday granted it temporary relief by lifting the freeze till a final hearing by its appellate tribunal next Wednesday. The accounts were frozen on a tax demand of ₹210 crore for 2018-19 as penalty for a 45-day delay in filing returns and cash contributions from its lawmakers, said the party. It appealed against the demand to the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT).

In its order, the tribunal directed the party to ensure that the accounts have a minimum deposit of ₹115 crore as lien. In a video message, Congress Rajya Sabha MP Vivek Tankha, who appeared before the ITAT, said the tribunal defroze the accounts and will hear the matter next Wednesday before taking the final call.

"On our petition, the IT department and the ITAT said we have to ensure that ₹115 crore is kept in the banks. Any amount over and above ₹115 crore can be spent. This means that ₹115 crore has been frozen. The ₹115 crore is much more than what we have in our current accounts," the party said.

Earlier in the day, senior Congress leader and treasurer Ajay Maken told a press conference that the IT department had frozen four main accounts of the Congress and the Youth Congress on frivolous and flimsy grounds leaving the party with no money to pay bills and salaries. "The crowdfunding money in our accounts has been frozen just two weeks before elections. When the opposition's accounts are frozen, it is equivalent to freezing democracy," said Maken.

"Since 2019 was an election year, the Congress submitted receipts of ₹199 crore spent on the elections. Of this amount ₹14.40 lakh had been deposited in cash by some Congress MPs and MLAs from their salaries," said Maken adding that it was shocking that the IT department had imposed a penalty of ₹210 crore on the cash deposit of ₹14.40 lakh. In his pushback, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said, "Don't be scared, Congress is not the party whose strength is money power, its strength is people's power."

BANKS TOLD TO PAY UP

Sharing two such I-T notices sent to its bankers — Bank of Baroda and SBI — Maken said the tax authorities directed them to pay them ₹135 crore and ₹75 crore respectively as income tax dues from the Congress accounts with them. The notice also held the bankers personally liable for paying the amount to the tax authorities

Trust vote ahead of Kejri's court date

ANUP VERMA @New Delhi

DELHI Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday moved a confidence motion in the Assembly, a day before he is to appear before a local court for ignoring five summonses from the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with the excise policy case.

The discussion on the motion will be held on Saturday. AAP is set to win the trust vote comfortably as it has 62 MLAs while the opposition BJP has eight, seven of whom have been suspended for the rest of the session for interrupting Lt Governor V K Saxena's speech in the Assembly on Thursday.

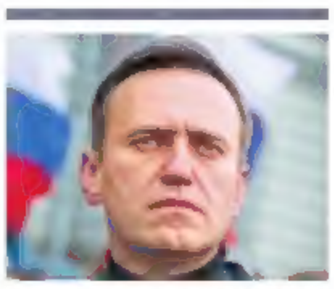
The ED has already sent its sixth summons to Kejriwal asking him to appear on Monday for questioning in connection with the scam.

Speaking in the Assembly, Kejriwal reiterated there was no scam in excise policy. He alleged that attempts were being made to poach AAP MLAs and topple his government by registering false cases and arresting its leaders one after another.

Tabling the motion, Kejriwal said he wants to show how BJP's 'Operation Lotus' has failed in Delhi. A few operatives recently approached seven AAP MLAs asking them to join the BJP for which they will receive ₹25 crore and an election ticket, he alleged. All AAP MLAs rejected the offer, he added.

Leader of the opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said he was surprised that Kejriwal was tabling a confidence motion alleging the BJP was trying to poach his MLAs. So far, he has not given any evidence to the police, which is probing the matter. The police has already requested him to provide proof to substantiate the charges, he said.

Today, Kejriwal has to appear before the local court, which last week said that he was "legally bound" to respond to ED's summonses in person and that his failure to do so is prima facie an offence under Section 174 of IPC. The ED alleges that the excise policy was tweaked to siphon funds for AAP leaders and the party.



NAVALNY

PUTIN RIVAL DIES

Russian opposition leader and the fiercest critic of President Vladimir Putin died in prison on Friday. He was 47. After a walk, he lost consciousness. An ambulance arrived to resuscitate him, but he could not be revived. Navalny's team, however, said it has no confirmation of his death | P12